

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

St Nicholas CE VC Primary School	
School Road Hurst Reading Berkshire RG10 ODR	
Current SIAMS inspection grade	Good
Diocese	Oxford
Previous SIAMS inspection grade	Good
Local authority	Oxford
Date/s of inspection	Monday 30 th January 2017
Date of last inspection	1 March 2012
Type of school and unique reference number	Primary 109972
Headteacher	Debra McGrail
Inspector's name and number	Jacque Coles 840

School context

St Nicholas CE Primary School is a smaller than average sized primary school serving the village and surrounding area. Pupil numbers are close to capacity with few spaces remaining. Most pupils are of White British heritage and numbers of pupils with special needs and those qualifying for pupil premium funding are below national average. There are very few pupils from a minority ethnic group or with English as an additional language. The headteacher has been appointed since the last SIAS inspection. The local church is currently without a priest in charge.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of St Nicholas as a Church of England school are good

- The positive drive of the headteacher together with the enthusiasm of the religious education (RE) and collective worship coordinator, has led to improved practice which has strengthened the Christian distinctiveness of the school.
- Christian values are understood, articulated and demonstrated in the strong cohesive relationships between all members of the school community who work together to create a nurturing, happy and inclusive school, where great value is placed on each individual.
- The secure partnerships with the local church and the village community are valued, with all opportunities being seized to work together. Pupils take the school's Christian values out into village life which supports the school's excellent reputation within the local community.

Areas to improve

- Raise the profile of Christianity in the RE curriculum, in line with new documentation so that it fully reflects the Christian foundation of the school.
- Develop a long term plan to ensure strategic actions develop the school's Christian character, alongside increased governor monitoring and challenge.
- Develop the quality of written prayers to match pupils' oral reflections, thereby deepening their spiritual development.

The school, through its distinctive Christian character, is good at meeting the needs of all learners

The school's Christian values, set within a secure biblical foundation, are clearly taught and consistently encouraged throughout the school. The mission statement and values are communicated well on the school's website and families are reminded of Christian links in the school newsletter. Christian values are an integral part of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Pupils show kindness and compassion, support each other to learn and grow, and live out their values to be caring citizens. The inclusive and warm ethos enables all pupils whatever their culture, needs or background, to be welcomed and valued. Individual gifts and achievement are celebrated. Focused data areas have improved. Pupils are able to articulate how personal reflections have caused them to change their choices. They are aware that their behaviour impacts on their learning and are keen to do their best at both school and at home. Pupils' behaviour is very good and bullying incidents are rare.

The Christian character shapes the relationships between all members of the school community; staff and parents operate within an atmosphere of trust and confidence. The cohesive staff team work in an open and collaborative style with good levels of communication, keeping pupils central in all they do. Pupils show respect and thoughtfulness to one another in their learning during the school day, and show sympathy and support to any in difficulty. The school is viewed highly by the local community. Families living in the village see the pupils' empathy, level of respect and support for their peers outside of school and are keen to be offered places for their child. The headteacher encourages a strong partnership with the village. Parents find the headteacher extremely approachable and have confidence that any concerns will be responded to swiftly. The RE curriculum utilises an enquiry approach and, alongside the use of philosophy for children, enables pupils to discuss and reflect. Pupils are able to contribute to class reflection books, which show thoughtful, personal considerations about what they have been discussing. Pupils have a good understanding of other faiths as the RE curriculum has a high proportion of its time given to this, with visits to other places of worship and visitors of other faiths being welcomed. However, this has reduced the school's RE contribution in determining the Christian character of the school, which could be given a greater profile. Pupils would like to have more Bibles at the school to handle and read for themselves and to be able to locate where the different Bible stories they hear, come from. They would also like to have the opportunity to write to children within their Nepalese link to develop further their links across the world. This would increase pupils' understanding of Christianity within the global community.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is good

Since the current headteacher came into post, the profile of collective worship has been raised and is now key in the communication of the school's Christian values. Pupils speak positively about how it helps them to reflect on Jesus's teaching for their lives and are able to talk with some understanding of the Trinity. Pupils are actively engaged in listening, prayer, singing, asking and answering questions and being helpers or leaders. They are keen to be involved and contribute enthusiastically. Pupils enjoy reciting their candle prayer to support their focus for their time together. The school's Christian foundation and the heritage work of St Nicholas has been incorporated into a school song, written and proudly sung by pupils; 'learn from our Saint in everything we do', in our caring, giving and sharing. Their good behaviour indicates their level of motivation to apply Christian principles to their daily actions. The strong sense of community in this village school enables families to respond well to charitable initiatives which reflects their kindness and generosity towards those less fortunate than themselves across the world. Pupils and parents also speak very highly of the annual shoe box donations where they feel they are able to see the impact of what they do.

Collaborative and supportive planning is firmly rooted within a distinctive Christian framework and follows the seasons of the church's year. The focus from the last inspection to ensure the continued improvement and relevance of collective worship by involving all stakeholders in its evaluation has been met. The school has taken action on the outcomes of surveys and feedback to improve provision, for example the suggestion to link Christian values to the merit awards. The planning and themes are structured as a result of feedback and to help teachers more confidently develop pupils' understanding of Christian values. It allows for a variety of styles and leaders, with pupils involved in planning, leading and evaluating acts of worship. Pupil music leaders look deeper into the words of songs and link these to the themes being taught. Effective records ensure there is a consistent and cohesive approach. Each theme is displayed around the school, for example on class thinking tables, supported by artwork and symbols, with opportunities for pupils to contribute further thoughts and respond to reflective questions.

Prayer is a natural feature of collective worship with familiar and new prayers being used. Pupils are aware of the value of personal prayer. They know that prayer and reflection is a time for quiet contemplation and they have a strong sense of trust in the school community, which enables them to share their thoughts and ideas at the end of reflection times. The school is not yet outstanding as the quality of written prayer does not reflect

the quality of pupils' reflections. The successful Year 6 prayer journey at the end of the year reflects on pupils' time at St Nicholas and is a helpful activity in preparing pupils for their move to secondary school. Despite there being a vacancy in the leadership of the church currently, the school has enlisted the support of a local retired vicar and members of the area team to visit the school. Messy Church held at the school is building effective relationships between church members and the children and families. Special occasions are marked by services in the local church, giving pupils an understanding of other Anglican traditions and practices. These are well attended by parents.

The effectiveness of the leadership and management of the school as a church school is good

The headteacher presents a secure picture of all the work that has been undertaken to secure the school's Christian character since she has been in post. Her collaborative and open style inspires a supportive staff team to respond with a good level of commitment to the school's clear mission statement. School achievement and progress data confirm its successful impact. Christian values inspire and nurture the wellbeing of the whole school community, with a family worker welcomed into homes to help and support families along life's way.

A focus from the last inspection was to ensure the continuing improvement of the school by the governing body. Governors take the Christian foundation of the school seriously. The SIAMS working party is an effective tool in this, bringing staff and governors together to evaluate provision as a church school and implement ideas for improvement. As a result, evaluation is accurate, with a good level of understanding from both governors and staff, who are committed to helping the headteacher and leader of collective worship and RE develop the Christian distinctiveness of the school. Leaders are well informed and gain helpful feedback of parental, pupil and staff views which gives them a clear understanding of strengths and areas for development. Governors are extremely supportive but do not have a long term plan in place which specifies visits and activities over time. Therefore, challenges and questions are not focused to ensure continued growth and development of staff.

The Diocese has been instrumental in offering key support to the leaders and along with opportunities to link with other church schools, offer scope to professionally develop all staff in both religious education and collective worship. These aid a deepening understanding of the distinctiveness of a church school and increased staff skills across the school to spiritually develop pupils further.

The school encourages pupils to take an active part in village and church events, demonstrating its Christian commitment to serve the local community. The strong links with the village give pupils and staff, a sense of belonging and a sense of social responsibility towards it. Pupils are gaining insight into their roles and responsibilities in not only the local, but also wider global communities. The school team and its partnerships within the local community have successfully enhanced the school's reputation. Parents present a supportive picture of what they think about the school. Parent surveys show a high level of confidence in the leadership, evidencing secure levels of wellbeing across the school community. Parents feel that the school listens to their views and that their opinions are valued.

The school has been able to sustain links with the church despite currently experiencing an interregnum with no appointed minister in place. Different members of a local church team attend regularly. Children are familiar with them and have confidence in them. The children look forward to them coming and remember their acts of worship, feeling encouraged to pursue the values explored in their teaching. The school has also forged links with other local churches to help sustain the Christian character of the school. One of these offers links through the Bungamati Foundation, which gives pupils some understanding of the world-wide church. The pupils would like to develop this link further.

Due to recent changes, the school now meets statutory requirements for RE and collective worship. An enthusiastic RE leader is rapidly growing in confidence, bringing about positive changes to provision, to enable all staff to have a good understanding of the scheme of work and deliver effective lessons. She also works effectively with the headteacher and visiting clergy to manage collective worship. Her collaborative style brings commitment and dedication from others, in the pursuit of her action plans. Staff feel well supported and valued as members of a team, committed to school improvement. All new staff are asked at interview to support the Christian foundation of the school to ensure a secure foundation for further development.

SIAMS report January 2017 St Nicholas CE Primary School, Hurst, Reading, RG10 ODR